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Ziegler Denies Report

The White House yesterday denied a published report that President Nixon has decided to give the House Judiciary Committee tapes of 42 presidential conversations that it wants for its inquiry into the President's possible impeachment.

"The White House position has not changed," presidential press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said in a statement issued at Camp David. "We continue to feel it is essential that the committee first define the charges and be specific on what materials are wanted and why."

The Los Angeles Times' Saturday editions quoted unnamed congressional sources as saying that the President was prepared to turn over the 42 disputed tape recordings this week.

The Times said unnamed House Judiciary Committee leaders were, in turn, moving at least part way to do two things the White House wants: narrow the scope of the inquiry and let the President's lawyers take part in the committee's proceedings.

While House aides made several trips to Capitol Hill last week to take soundings among Republicans on impeachment generally, and the issue of the tapes in particular.

The Judiciary Committee's leaders have indicated that they are prepared to subpoena the tapes if they have to, but want to avoid such a confrontation. Some members of Congress have also argued that the simple refusal to turn over the tapes could constitute an impeachable act by Mr. Nixon.

Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-Pa.) warned White House aides at one session last week that a confrontation with the committee over the tapes would be costly to the President.

The disputed tapes are of presidential conversations in February, March and April of last year. The committee reportedly wants them to help determine when the President first became aware of the Watergate cover-up. That date is one of the keys to the case.

An aide to Sen. Scott said Scott was not the source of the assertion that the White House had decided to give up the 42 tapes, adding, "We have no way of knowing what the White House intends to do."

In a related development, Ziegler took vigorous issue yesterday with another Los Angeles Times story, published Saturday, that called a tape of the President's conversation with his former counsel John W. Dean III on March 21 of last year "explosive" and "unambiguous."

The President has said that it was in this conversation that he first learned of the Watergate cover-up and of efforts to buy the original Watergate defendants' silence, and that he told Dean those efforts were "wrong."

Quoting two unnamed "government sources,"—one in congress and the other in the Executive branch—the Times' story suggested that the tape gives the opposite impression. The March 21 tapes have been given to the Judiciary Committee. Ziegler said "the malicious intentions of the individuals who planted" the Times story "are clear," and that the appearance of such stories "cannot help but influence the White House attitude with respect to providing additional materials in the future" to the committee.